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SUBJECT: DARFUR ROUNDUP: ATTACK ON SLM/MM, URF DISSOLUTION, AND JEM
CRITICISM OF BASHIR'S PLAN FOR DARFUR

REF: KHARTOUM 567

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¶1. (U) SUMMARY: On July 28, Minni Minnawi and two other SLM/MM leaders confirmed reports that a Government of Sudan (GoS) security force attacked and killed four SLM policemen on July 26 in North Darfur. SLM/MM leaders described the event as an "intentional attack" on their movement coinciding with President Bashir's visit to Darfur. Meanwhile, United Resistance Front leaders dismissed reports of the dissolution of their rebel alliance, though admitted that the United Revolutionary Force Front (URFF) had left the alliance months ago. Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) leaders also denied newspaper reports of their acceptance of President Bashir's vague Darfur initiative. END SUMMARY.

ATTACK ON SLM/MM POLICE OUTPOST

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¶2. (SBU) On July 28, Senior Presidential Assistant Minni Minawi spoke with Poloff by satellite phone from North Darfur, and confirmed reports that four MM soldiers were killed at an outpost in an attack by GoS forces on July 26 (he had previously denied a specific media report of SAF bombing though). Minawi referred Poloff to his military spokesman, Mohammed Dirbeen, for more information, and restated his eagerness to speak with CDA Fernandez later this week in Darfur, should the regime allow him to travel there.

¶3. (SBU) Later in the day, SLM/MM military spokesman Mohammed Dirbeen also confirmed that 36 Central Reserve Force vehicles attacked an SLM police outpost near Abu Hamra (20 km south of Shangil Tobaya) killing four officers. Dirbeen said that this convoy of GoS security forces (and formally a janjaweed unit widely known as the "Abu Terra brigade") was traveling from El-Fasher to Niyala on July 26. As the brigade passed the SLM outpost in Abu Hamra, the government forces opened fire on the SLM police, driving away the policemen, killing four of the men, and later completely burning the police station. Dirbeen stated that these events follow widespread bombing of Darfur occurring simultaneously with President Bashir's tour of Darfur. "He [Bashir] calls for peace and all the while he is bombing Jebel Moon, Jebel Marra, and all over the region," stated Dirbeen. Dirbeen added that UNAMID or representatives of the international community should immediately visit these sites, collect evidence, and issue reports on these security incidents. Dirbeen said that the government needs to hand over the leaders of the central reserve unit responsible for the attack or present SLM/MM with immediate compensation or else "there will be big problems." The SLM's Capacity and Party Building manager Bushara Hassan separately told poloff that this was an "intentional attack" on SLM Minnawi forces whose "sole mission was to try to bring security and decrease banditry in that region." Hassan said that Minnawi authorized SLM military spokesman Mohamed Dirbeen (who reported the story to Reuters and Al-Jazeera) to speak for the movement about this event.

URF DENIES BREAKUP

14. (SBU) On July 28 Poloff spoke with Bahar Idriss Abu Garda, Chairman of JEM/Collective Leadership and head of the coalition United Resistance Front (URF). Reacting to a report claiming that three of the five rebel groups had walked out of the URF coalition, Abu Garda dismissed the report and stated that URF remains intact with four of the original five movements. (Note: URF was formed as a result of SPLM-hosted Darfur consolidation talks as a conglomerate of five separate movements: the Arab-dominated United Revolutionary Forces Front (URFF), SLA-Field Command, the National Movement for ReForm and Development (NMRD), SLA-Khamis Abdalla, and the Justice and Equality Movement/Collective Leadership (JEM/CL). End Note) Abu Garda stated that the only movement to have pulled out of URF was one that left previously, URFF. That pullout had come as a surprise, he said, because URFF representatives gave no indication that they were unhappy with the movement. He speculated that URFF was goaded into withdrawing by Eritrea, who is seeking renewed influence with the rebel movements after losing some control. He also stated that some URFF rebels see the pullout as a mistake, noting that one individual called him from Asmara expressing a desire to return.

15. (SBU) When queried by Poloff specifically about the departures of Adam Ali Shoggar, Khamis Abdalla Abakar and Ibrahim al-Zubaidi, Abu Garda framed these as individual departures and not representative of any rebel factions. He noted that Ibrahim al-Zubaidi "left months ago" and blamed Adam Ali Shoggar for announcing the joint departure in an attempt to create discord within the URF. He also played down the departure of Khamis Abdalla, stating that from the first days of URF he had opted not to play an active role due to his poor health. Poloff also spoke with Tajedine Niam, JEM/CL Political Commissar who served as JEM negotiator in Abuja, who stated that "some individuals are leaving for various purposes" but URF is still very solid and holding together.

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16. (SBU) Abu Garda also noted that three days ago, URF representatives met with Minni Minnawi in Darfur to discuss on the ground cooperation on humanitarian and security issues. Abu Garda relayed that Minnawi discussed a possible visit by CDA Fernandez to SLM/MM in the field, and Abu Garda told Poloff that he too would like to meet the CDA, especially "to arrange a meeting with Special Envoy Williamson" whenever he decides to next visit Sudan.

JEM DENIES APPROVAL OF BASHIR'S DARFUR INITIATIVE

17. (SBU) On July 28, the pro-government "Akbar Al-Youm" reported that the GoS welcomed the JEM acceptance of President Bashir's Darfur initiative. JEM Spokesman Ahmed Hussein later denied this report to Poloff, describing it as propaganda orchestrated by the intelligence and security. Hussein also stated that the JEM representative quoted in the story, legislative Council president Dr. Tahir Adam Al-Faki, was not authorized to speak on behalf of JEM, describing him as "a colleague who is very simple and occasionally troublesome." Hussein stated that JEM will consider any proposal that is presented in formal negotiations with international observers. He said that Bashir's initiative consists "just of general statements presented in the media."

18. (SBU) On other issues, Hussein noted that newly appointed UN/AU joint Mediator Djibril Bassole has reached out numerous times to JEM leaders and that he was expecting a phone call from Bassole on July 28. Although critical of Bassole's silence on Ocampo's request for a warrant against President Bashir, Hussein was hopeful that Bassole will bring a new energy to the peace process. Hussein said that JEM will not be attending a meeting in Arusha for Darfur leaders sponsored by the Darfur Relief and Documentation Centre, as it is designed for intellectuals, civil society leaders and academics, not Darfur rebel movements. He said he discussed the initiative with DRDC director Abdel Bagi Jibril, and that although some loosely affiliated JEM members may attend the meeting, they will not represent JEM. With respect to the reported URF breakup, Jibril stated that URF became irrelevant long ago. He said while it is unlikely that URF splinter groups would join JEM, there may be close

coordination with some of them (such as former URF leaders such as Khamis Abdalla Abakir) in the future.

COMMENT

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19. (SBU) The day's URF and JEM stories appear to be the work of the GoS's state information machine. Nonetheless, these distortions sparked some other interesting information including URF's claim of meeting Minnawi this week and Abu Garda's hope to meet U.S. leadership in the near future. The insubordination of one JEM leader's comments to the press appears to be a rare slip for the highly coordinated and tightly controlled JEM media machine. Hussein appeared embarrassed by his organization's blunder and the quick GoS's exploitation of it. Most significant of all these events is the attack on the SLM police outpost, especially as it coincided with the Bashir visit and Minnawi's continued protest against the GNU. While it is difficult to assess whether this was an "intentional attack" as SLM/MM claim, or an out-of-control militia force, there is need for more UNAMID fact-finding and reporting on security incidents, as Dirbeen and dozens of other Darfuris have constantly reminded us (and as we constantly remind UNAMID - but they need to hear it again).

FERNANDEZ